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## Comments on colour varieties in the Golden Plover

by BRYAN L. SAGE

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In the course of studies on albinism and melanism in birds I have collected records relating to five species in the family Charadriidae. A total of 24 of these records refer to the Golden Plover *Charadrius apricarius* Linnaeus and these fall into the following categories—melanism 1, unclassified 1, albinism 22.

### MELANISM

The single record in this category is of an almost entirely black bird with some yellowish mottling on the back, seen in the vicinity of St. Columb, Cornwall, on 24th January, 1933 (C. J. Stevens *in litt.*).

### UNCLASSIFIED

A bird in which the general body plumage was a pale lemon-yellow with the normal dark markings reduced to a very pale brown; bill and legs normal in colour, was seen near Tarsset, Northumberland, on 23rd November, 1957 (G. W. Temperley *in litt.*). The description suggests that this may have been an example of dilution, but it is impossible to say definitely that the reduction of the pigments had been uniform throughout. The other alternative is that the bird was a non-eumelanic schizochroic variety in which the great reduction of the black pigment resulted in an impression of overall paleness.

### ALBINISM

The 22 records in this category can be divided into two groups, *viz.*:

(1) Albinism affecting the body plumage only, or the body and wings. There are only six records in this group and in view of the apparent infrequency of this form of albinism in the Golden Plover it seems worth while listing these.

(a) A specimen obtained near Forest Gate, Essex, in April 1871 by Mr. J. Glessing had all the feathers cream and white (Glegg 1929).

(b) A partially white example purchased in Leadenhall Market was exhibited to the British Ornithologists' Club on 10th December, 1913. It had numerous white feathers in the plumage, and all the markings on the back and wings were white instead of golden (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 33: 87).

(c) A buff-coloured bird with white wings was seen near St. Keverne, Cornwall, in December 1932 (C. J. Stevens *in litt.*).

(d) An albino was present at Skegness, Lincolnshire, on 12th November, 1955, and was reported by J. K. Burton (R. Cornwallis *in litt.*).

(e) A completely white bird with some brownish-yellow markings on the wings was seen at Birsay, Orkney Islands, on 2nd September, 1956 (P. J. B. Slater *in litt.*).

(f) One with the head, neck, flanks, rump and tail-coverts pure white, remainder of the plumage normal, was seen at Weymouth, Dorset, on 30th December, 1958 (A. J. Hold *in litt.*).

(2) Albinism affecting only the wings.

Sixteen records come into this group, which is an interestingly high proportion. In four of these records the birds are described as having "white wings" and no further details are given. In nine other cases the white was stated to be confined to the primaries only. One is mentioned as having a white patch on the upper surface of each wing; another had white on the primaries and probably also on the secondaries of each wing; and one had white on the primaries and greater wing-coverts.

The latter example is shown in Plate 1. The wings were found at a Peregrine eyrie in Scotland in May 1963, and the albinism was exactly



Wing of Golden Plover, Scotland, May 1963, showing white markings on the primaries and greater wing-coverts. The markings were identical on both wings.

symmetrical in each wing. The 6th–8th primaries of each were white except for the tips, and three of the greater wing-coverts were white for the basal half.

## DISCUSSION

It is interesting to note that when albinism does occur in this species it affects the wings far more frequently than any other part of the plumage, and often results in a strikingly symmetrical patterning. Melanism would appear to be of very rare occurrence.

In two previous papers (Sage 1958, 1959) I described a colour aberration that has been recorded in a fairly stable form in five species of the genus *Larus*. This aberration takes the form of an oblong white patch located on

the primary wing-coverts, but sometimes extending onto the primaries. A comparison of Plate 1 with the illustrations given in the papers just mentioned reveals a certain measure of similarity. Whether or not any significance can be attached to this is problematical, but the basic resemblance of the markings and the similar *locus* are worth noting.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### House Crow's nest in a house

by K. Z. HUSAIN

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The Indian House Crow (*Corvus s. splendens*) is one of the commonest birds of East Pakistan and one whose close association with man is well known. Although it spends practically the whole of the day, as well as of the year, near and around houses, it is known to nest only in trees. I recently saw a pair of these House Crows building inside a house, which, as far as I can see (Baker, 1922; Fletcher & Inglis, 1936; Whistler, 1949; Ali, 1955; and others) has not yet been recorded in literature.

The nest was in fact built in my house which occupies the first floor of the two-storied southern (front) block of a quadrangular residential Hall of the University of Dacca. There is a fairly big lawn in front with only two Bottle-palm (Royal-palm) trees close to the gate and two buildings at a distance. There are several big trees about 100 yards away and many House Crows nest in them. The pair in question built their nest in the verandah of my house. The verandah is about 45 feet long, 8 feet wide and 13 feet high. The roof is supported in the front by seven 2-feet wide pillars at a distance of five feet from one another; the verandah has a 3 feet high wall rising from the floor, and also a 3 feet wide wall descending from the roof. An unused 3 feet long metal bracket, which once conducted electric wires, projects from the wall of the house and into the verandah. The bracket is located at 13 feet above the floor, and there are some broken wires connected to it. The House Crows brought in some sticks and built their nest; thus, it can be said that the nest was built well within the house.

The nest must have been built between the 23rd and 29th April, 1963, when I and my family were away. An egg was laid on the 30th April or 1st May. The egg hatched on the 21st May, but unfortunately the nestling died on the 14th June.

This unsuccessful attempt by the House Crows at nesting in a house, the circumstances which presumably led to the nestling's death, and a few other activities of these crows during the period under review seem to me to be of significance, and are therefore briefly reported below.

(1) The House Crows in question laid only one egg. This seems to be significant, because, according to existing literature, they lay at least four,